

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 145

EA 019 064

TITLE Designing Effective Teacher Evaluation Plans.
Research in Brief.
INSTITUTION National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Collected Works
- Serials (022)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Guidelines; National
Surveys; *Program Effectiveness; School Districts;
Success; *Teacher Evaluation

ABSTRACT

School districts with successful teacher evaluation programs all treat evaluation as a major district responsibility, allocate considerable resources to evaluation, carry out the programs as planned, keep administrators and teachers well informed about the plan, develop methods for ensuring the competence of evaluators, and use the evaluation results. These conclusions were drawn following a survey of 32 school districts across the nation with highly developed teacher evaluation programs, and after further, intensive study of four of the most advanced districts: Salt Lake City, Utah; Lake Washington, Washington; Greenwich, Connecticut; and Toledo, Ohio. The four systems differed, but were similar in sharing the traits found to be common in successful programs. It was concluded that five factors were critical to the development of an effective program: (1) the teacher evaluation system must suit the educational goals, management style, and community values of the school district; (2) the district must be willing to commit time and money to evaluation; (3) the district must establish the goals for its program and design the program accordingly; (4) the program must be useful to the district, to the school community, and to the community at large; and (5) teachers must be involved and given responsibility. (PGD)

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ED277145



RESEARCH IN BRIEF

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Designing Effective Teacher Evaluation Plans

Most school districts, despite good intentions, don't spend enough time sufficiently developing effective teacher evaluation systems.

That is one of the conclusions of a research project, conducted by the Rand Corporation and funded by the National Institute of Education (NIE), which examined teacher evaluation plans across the country. This study is especially timely because teacher evaluation has been thrown into the limelight as school districts across the nation consider merit pay and master teacher programs.

In this Rand/NIE project, researchers surveyed 32 school districts with highly developed teacher evaluation plans and then intensively studied four of the most advanced: Salt Lake City, Utah; Lake Washington, Wash.; Greenwich, Conn.; and Toledo, Ohio.

Although all four evaluation systems differ, they are alike in that all the school districts treat teacher evaluation as an important issue and a major district responsibility. This contrasts sharply with many school dis-

tricts which evaluate teachers simply to comply with state laws or to respond to community sentiment. Few of these latter evaluation programs are effective.

The four districts studied intensively in this project share other successful traits: the school districts allocate considerable resources to evaluation and actually carry out their teacher evaluation programs as planned; everyone (teachers, principals and administrators) understands the plan; and, the districts actually use the results.

They all also developed ways to ensure the competence of their evaluators, one of the most difficult aspects of establishing a successful teacher evaluation process. Most evaluation plans are not designed simply to get rid of poor teachers, but are intended to improve instruction as well. Therefore, evaluators must be able to make sound judgments about others' teaching abilities and recommend ways a teacher can improve.

Each of the four school districts strives to make sure its evaluation process is recognized as valid. Toledo's evaluators, for example, are consulting teachers recognized by their peers and administrators as experts in their teaching areas.

Salt Lake City, on the other hand, uses principals to evaluate its teachers and to initiate probation procedures for those who are performing poorly. Expert teachers then work with those on probation. To increase the validity of evaluations, the school district provides the expert teachers with special training. Thus the principals (evaluators) and expert teachers share a common understanding of good teaching. This helps ensure that the teacher having difficulty receives help that is consistent with the criteria on which s/he is evaluated.

Based on their examination of these teacher evaluation plans, the researchers concluded that the following factors are crucial to developing effective evaluation systems:

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1. A teacher evaluation system must suit the educational goals, management style and community values of the school district. An evaluation system that works for one school district won't necessarily work for another. Lake Washington, for example, is the hub of the aerospace industry. The community's professional clientele can relate to an engineering approach to problem solving. Thus, they support the school district's highly structured teacher evaluation plan. Salt Lake City, on the other hand, has been successful with a hard-nosed, yet relatively informal teacher evaluation process which better suits the area's culture, which emphasizes education, community and cooperation.

2. A school district must be willing to commit time and money to its evaluation program. Toledo, for example, uses consulting teachers as evaluators. They are released from classroom teaching responsibilities full- or part-time for up to three years, depending on the number of teachers they are evaluating. Because evaluating

teachers is a difficult and complex task, the district must be prepared to train evaluators and hold them accountable.

3. The district must decide what it wants its evaluation system to accomplish, then plan accordingly. For example, is the evaluation to be used to help teachers improve their teaching skills? Or is its main purpose to weed out incompetent teachers? Or, perhaps, it is to be used for merit pay or master teacher plans. The school district must chose a process that fits its purpose.

4. To maintain resource commitments and political support, an evaluation plan must be useful to the school district and community. It must also be credible and useful to teachers, administrators and parents. It should offer plausible solutions to the needs and problems teachers face. Teacher organizations also should be involved in designing the system.

5. Finally, teacher involvement and responsibility improve the quality of teacher evaluation. The school district should involve expert teachers in the supervision and assis-

tance of their peers, particularly beginning teachers and those who need special help. The use of expert teachers is probably the most practical way to give specialized help to teachers who need it.

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Copies of the two-volume project report on this subject, 'Teacher Evaluation: A Study of Effective Practices,' can be obtained for \$7.50 each from the Publications Department, Rand Corporation, 1700 Main Street, PO Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90406-2138.

For information about other NIE-supported teacher evaluation projects, contact Joseph Vaughan, NIE, 1200 19th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20208. (Please include a self-addressed label.)

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September/October 1984